

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

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DENMARK

Donations for Religious Institutions to be Exempted from Taxation.

With effect from January 1st this year donations of up to 1,000 Danish crowns annually towards charity and public utility associations and institutions for the benefit of larger groups of people will be exempted from taxation. The donation must exceed 100 crowns, however, and for practical reasons the minimum amount towards each individual purpose has been fixed at 50 crowns, although this may be paid in several instalments if preferred.

Among the group of associations and similar bodies entitled to receive tax-free donations are "religious institutions and associations within the Lutheran National Church and other recognized Churches, including foreign missions, as well as institutions engaged in relief work".

A long list of such bodies entitled to receive tax-free donations has just been published and is expected to be extended later this year.

Co-operation Between Bishops and Educationalists.

At an extraordinary Bishops' Conference last month the Bishops of the Danish Lutheran National Church met with the Curriculum Committee of the Ministry of Education in order to plan for the instruction for confirmation, normally taking place during the seventh school year. The resulting agreement must be considered satisfactory from a church point of view in as much as the pupils will be excused from the first lesson of the day twice a week to attend instead the instruction for confirmation. In smaller parishes with confirmation only once per annum the previous instruction must amount to at least 48 lessons while in big parishes where confirmation takes place twice a year the minimum may be 36 lessons.

At the same Conference the Bishops and a number of prominent public school teachers of religion discussed the position of religious instruction in the curriculum, and a joint committee was set up in order to deal with a number of problems of interest to both parties.

This joining of forces by the Bishops and educationalists has been heartily approved by the "Kristeligt Dagblad", expressing the hope that it may prove a fruitful effort to help the generation now growing up. Hitherto instances of co-operation between teachers and clergymen have mostly been of a local nature.

Denmark's Minister of Church Affairs Visits China.

The Danish Minister of Church Affairs, Mrs. Bodil Koch, will leave for China at the end of May together with her husband, Dr. Hal Koch, Professor of Theology, and their daughter, Marianne Koch, who is a divinity student. The Koch family has been invited by the Chinese Minister of Education. Mrs. Bodil Koch has visited China before as a member of a cultural delegation.

Indian Management of the Arcot Church.

The management of the Lutheran Arcot Church established on the mission field in India by the Danish Missionary Society has now become purely Indian, the newly elected President, Secretary, and Treasurer all being Indians. The Danish Missionary Society had informed the Arcot Church that the time was considered ripe for the Indians to take over the leading positions in the Church and thus the news that this now had been effected was received with satisfaction by the Board of the Missionary Society.

New Hymn-Book for the Greenlanders.

A new edition of the hymn-book in the Greenland language is expected in a few years. A committee, headed by the Rural Dean on Greenland, Rev. Holger Balle, has proceeded so far that a presentation of its results may be expected some time this summer.

In an interview in the "Grønlandsposten" Rev. H. Balle says that the new hymn-book does not signify any marked change from the present one. A number of hymns, the wording of which has changed to less happy expressions in the course of time, will be brought closer to the original text, and new hymns will also be included. The two main purposes in revising the hymn-book have been to encourage new authors of hymns in the Greenland language and to discover any already existing hymns in private possession.

Well-known Methodist Minister Resigns from the Church.

Due to dogmatic divergences the Rev. Povl-Erik Bjerno, D.D., Esbjerg, one of the most prominent Methodist ministers, has voluntarily resigned from the Methodist Church. Rev. P.-E. Bjerno, at one time Secretary General of the National Union of Danish Temperance Societies, has served the Methodist Church as a minister for 13 years. Last summer he caused an animated discussion by suggesting that all the Free Church communities in Denmark should be joined together in one church union (see C.N. No. 51).

FINLAND

Co-operation Between Christian Youth Organizations.

The Swedish speaking youth organizations of the Lutheran National Church in Finland "Evangelical Youth" (Evangeliska Unga) and "Youth of the Church" (Kyrkans Ungdom) have joined in with the "Board for parish work in the Swedish speaking Diocese" (Förbundet för Svenskt Församlingsarbete) in the preparations for the annual Kirchentage, this year to take place at Vasa from June 10th-12th under the main theme of "Youth, Home, Congregation".

In an article in the "Församlingsbladet" Bishop G.O. Rosenqvist of the Swedish speaking Diocese draws attention to the happy fact that the two youth organizations which have often been rather far apart in their views have decided to join forces in preparing for the Kirchentage.

In this connection the Bishop mentions a joint students' conference at Jyväskylä from June 2nd-6th being planned by the Evangelical and Læstadian student associations in common, both Swedish and Finnish speaking. It will be the only students' conference in Finland this summer, so a very large number of undergraduates is expected to attend.

Card Index Instead of Parish Registers.

In a report to be discussed in the spring by various instances a committee set up by the Enlarged Bishops' Conference has suggested that the parish registers which in Finland also serve as national registers should be rearranged, the present system of bound books to be replaced by a card index system. The committee further suggests the establishment of a new organ in connection with the Church management which should organize the registration of the population in such a way that it became as uniform as possible all over the country. Moreover it is suggested that the various dioceses should be divided into smaller sections, one clergyman in each section being charged with the supervision of the national registration in that section.

The committee suggests that the new system should be introduced on January 1st, 1961, and that the co-ordinating organ for national registration should be established from June 1st this year already so that it might lead the practical preparations for the change-over.

As in Sweden where this new system is already put in practice the clergymen of the Lutheran National Church in Finland are responsible for the national civil registration of the population in the individual parishes.

Renewed Demands for Censorship on Account of the M.R.A. Pamphlet.

The M.R.A. pamphlet "Ideology and Co-Existence" having now been published also in the Swedish language in Finland the "Finland-Soviet Union Society" has once more demanded the introduction of public censorship on the grounds that the pamphlet is directed against "a country with which we maintain friendly relations".

This has given rise to a debate in the Press both on the demand for censorship and on the pamphlet causing the demand. Thus the "Abo Underrättelser" writes:

"If this kind of precautionary measure in consideration of foreign politics should really be adopted, that is, adopted with any consistency, then how about that section of our Press which, day in and day out, spits out gall and venom on western powers with whom we likewise maintain friendly relations? No, the only correct and sensible attitude must be to criticize sharply in public such publications of failing judgment as the smug M.R.A. manifesto. But one must be very careful not to shout for police and censorship in such cases - that is, if one wants to live up to the loyalty towards freedom and democracy which all voices in all camps in this country are so eager to profess."

20 Years Since the Finnish "Winter War".

Twenty years having elapsed since the end of the Finnish "Winter War", the Finnish Press last month contained several comments on the matter. Thus the religious paper "Kotimaa" wrote, among other things:

"To all outer appearances the 13th March 1940 was a moment of defeat: the war had been lost. But inwardly something irreplaceable had been gained. The only purpose in our minds when we entered upon an unequal war of defence had been achieved: the independence of our country had been preserved."

In another commemorative article the Rev. Holger Pohjolan-Pirhonen wrote:

"The 'Winter War' proved that even the poorest and most unhappy person had something to lose. The result was a cold determination which could accept no alternative. With regard to its national development our people was like a youth quickly grown up when it entered the 'Winter War'. A hard fate brought the nation to early maturity. The inward peace was constantly shaken by tribulations which seemed to leave not the slightest room for ideals. One learnt that the world is governed by hard facts. But we must remember that the spirit of the 'Winter War', its patriotism, unity, and trust in God were also hard facts on which our independence was, and still is, based."

Money Instead of Flowers at Funerals.

In Finland, as in many other countries, it is customary to send flowers - often in great masses - to funerals. Feeling that in many cases the family of the deceased need money rather than well-meant flowers, the Union of Congregations of the Church in Finland in 1951 set up a fund called "Aid from Friends" to which friends and acquaintances of the deceased may instead of flowers send money which is later given to the bereaved. This practice is becoming more and more common and last year, for instance, the fund paid out 16,3 million Finnish marks.

Rev. S. Palosuo to be Director of the Järvenpää Institute.

The present Assistant Director of the Laymen's Institute of the Lutheran National Church in Finland at Järvenpää, Rev. Simo Palosuo, has been appointed Director of the Institute as from September 1st next when Dr. Aarne Siirala will retire. Mr. Palosuo is 42 years old and has been employed at the Institute since 1950.

Ecumenical Research on Christian Baptism.

In the course of the opening address of a discussion arranged by the Ecumenical Council of Finland Professor Aimo T. Nikolainen said that in later years ecumenical research on baptism has been based less on confessions of faith than on the Bible. He noted with regret that both baptism and Holy Communion have divided rather than united Christendom. According to Professor Nikolainen baptism does not play such an important part in some denominations as in the church of New Testament times. But especially during these later years a certain crisis in connection with the conception of baptism may be noted, a crisis which may possibly arise from the gulf between baptism and Holy Communion.

Professor Nikolainen mentioned three points as being characteristic of modern research on baptism, based on the Bible: 1) In the New Testament baptism is the sacrament of the open door through which one passes into the Christian congregation. 2) Infant baptism was a New Testament custom, although not so that the children were believed to possess magic faith, but parents and God-parents were responsible for the children. Baptism was accompanied by the Creed. The objective and subjective aspects were equally emphasized. 3) Baptism means participation in Christ in all aspects.

NORWAY

Call to Prayer for South Africa.

Developments in South Africa have caused a number of protests in Norway, also from the Church, against the injustices committed against the Negroes.

At its annual meeting at the end of March the Norwegian Missionary Council, representing 21 Churches and missionary organizations, passed a resolution calling to prayer for South Africa. The resolution reads: "The Missionary Council appeals to all who believe in the power of prayer to cry to God for freedom and decent living conditions for our sisters and brothers in South Africa."

18 Churches and Chapels Rebuilt in Northern Norway.

In an interview in the religious paper in Oslo "Vårt Land" the Bishop of North Hålogaland, Bishop Alf Wiig, says that 18 of the 28 churches and chapels demolished during the war have now been restored. Three churches are under construction, work will be started on 2 this year, and on 3 more next year. Two of the churches will not be rebuilt. Several chapels have been moved to other localities due to changes in the density of population. A number of new chapels have been erected, are under construction, or are being planned for so that eventually the 28 churches and chapels destroyed will be replaced by 47 new ones.

26 Army Chaplains in Norway.

During a visit of inspection in Bergen recently Rev. Erling Ulveit, Dean of the Army, said that the system of army chaplains in Norway has now been almost completed as far as economy and personnel allow. From July 1st next there will be 26 military chaplains, including the navy chaplain in charge of personnel on navy crafts, and in addition to this 4-5 divinity graduates will serve for one year. But there are not enough chapels or soldiers' homes, although new ones are planned in several places besides the 6-7 already existing. The present soldiers' homes have been established mainly by the Young People's Union and the Inner Mission, but many more are needed.

In a statement in the religious paper in Bergen "Dagen" the Army Dean stresses the cordial acceptance of the chaplains by the military authorities.

Norwegian Aid to Underdeveloped Countries.

Professor G.M. Gerhardsen has suggested in a leader in the Norwegian paper "Aftenposten" that Norway's contributions to the underdeveloped countries should be raised from the present 20 million Norwegian crowns annually to 200 million crowns, adding, however, that a temporary amount of 100 million crowns would be a good beginning.

200 million crowns annually would be app. one fourth of the present increase in national income and the amount would be a reasonable contribution from a country like Norway when compared with the need for capital according to expert analyses and estimates to be needed in the course of the next few years in the underdeveloped countries.

Encouraging Results from Dividing a Parish.

According to the weekly paper "Vår Kirke" the Nordstrand parish in Oslo has had encouraging results with regard to increased contact between Church and population from an experiment of dividing a section of the

parish into districts of some 20 families with a "district superintendent" as contact man. So far the experiment has been carried out in a section of 800-900 inhabitants with satisfactory results.

"We have discovered many more people ready to take part in the plan than we had dared hope for", says Mr. Eilert Løhlin, one of the men behind the plan and a prominent spokesman for increased lay contribution in the Church. And the interest in religious matters in the parish turns out to be greater than might be supposed from the present work in hand.

The task of the "district superintendent" will be to distribute the parish paper and to invite people to arrangements in the church and the parish hall, besides being a personal contact between the Church and the inhabitants. A part-time secretary for the whole section is to visit old people and invalids on information obtained from the "district superintendent", to keep in touch with the homes of children christened in church, to conduct Bible study groups, and in various other ways to maintain contact between Church, minister, and members of the congregations.

Protest Against Dancing as Compulsory School Subject.

According to the new curriculum for the 9-year public school dancing is to be a compulsory subject in school. The pupils are to learn old-fashioned as well as modern ball-room dancing, as appears from the description of the subject, called "rhythmic activities".

Different quarters within the Church have protested against this decision. Thus the religious paper "Dagen" in Bergen writes:

"Surely our educational authorities cannot be unaware that a very large part of the Norwegian people strongly disapproves of dancing. Misgivings are caused especially by modern dancing and the excesses often deriving from it. Many Norwegian parents do not want their children to learn dancing. To our opinion, making dancing a compulsory school subject is an encroachment on the privileges of parents. We do not know the extent to which local school managements may deviate from the standard curriculum, but even so discussions about this subject must lead to deep divergences in many places in the country, and many minority groups will be subjected to severe qualms of conscience. Many teachers will also be faced with serious problems because of this new subject.

Token of Expiation Completed in Northern Norway.

At a ceremony on March 20th a group of young Germans, headed by the divinity graduate Hans Richard Nevermann, handed over the administration block of a home for mentally deficient at Trastad in Northern Norway which they have built as part of the "Aktion Sühnezeichen". When quite completed the building will have cost 330,000 Norwegian crowns, collected in the German Evangelical Church, and put up by a group of 30 young Germans in six months as a token of expiation for the destructions in Norway caused by their countrymen during the War and the Occupation.

"Aktion Sühnezeichen" was started by Dr. Lothar Kreyssig and is carried out in a number of countries formerly occupied by Germany. A chapel will also be erected in Northern Norway.

Conception of Bible Must Take Preference over Conception of Church.

In Norway Bishop Bo Giertz, leader of the "Kyrklig Samling" (Confessional Front) in Sweden, has been attacked also by Low Church quarters which otherwise, like he, are opposed to women pastors. The religious paper "Dagen" in Bergen deplures this, feeling that it will be dangerous if people faithful to the Bible cannot all unite as they have done in

Sweden. In this matter the fear of High Church tendencies must not be decisive. If it is impossible because of their diverging conceptions of the Church to unite people having the same view of the Bible, it shows that the Church means more to them than the Bible, the paper writes, expressing the belief that the question of women pastors will come to a head in Norway in a few months and that ordination of women will soon take place in Norway. Such an event will weaken the reverence for the Bible in the nation, but this damage might be somewhat lessened by making it quite clear that in Norway as in Sweden all acknowledging the authority of the Bible stand united in this matter.

SWEDEN

First Women Ordained in Sweden.

The National Lutheran Church of Sweden got her first women ministers on Palm Sunday, April 10th. In the Cathedral of Stockholm the Bishop of Stockholm Dr. Helge Ljungberg ordained Miss Elisabeth Djurle, B.D., and the Swedish people could follow the ordination service through television and radio. In the chapel of St. Catherine's Foundation, Österskär north of Stockholm, the Archbishop of Uppsala Dr. Gunnar Hultgren ordained Dr. Margit Sahlin, B.D., and in the Cathedral of Härnösand the deaconess Miss Ingrid Persson, B.D., was ordained by the Bishop of Härnösand Dr. Ruben Josefson. The public interest in the ordination services was extremely great but there was an atmosphere of dignity and quietness over these events of historical importance.

Rev. Elisabeth Djurle has been appointed for service in the parish of Nacka, a town in the neighbourhood of Stockholm, and Rev. Ingrid Persson in Örnsköldsvik in the northern part of the country. Dr. Sahlin will continue her work as the leader of St. Catherine's Foundation which is a retreat house and a conference centre for contacts especially with women.

Fourth Woman Minister in Sweden?

The Cathedral Chapter at Lund has consented to the woman divinity graduate, Mrs. Brita Olén-van Zilj, taking Holy Orders, and the See of Lund being vacant at the moment, the Dean has been asked to find out whether another Bishop will be willing to perform the ordination service. So far the Bishops approached have declined as they do not wish to ordain women outside of their own dioceses.

Mrs. Brita Olén-van Zilj is married to a Reformed Church minister in South Africa, but her father, Rector of Karlskrona, has asked her to act as his assistant curate during the summer months, this being the reason for her request for ordination.

The organ of the "Kyrklig Samling" (Confessional Front) "Svensk Pastoraltidskrift" has protested against the Cathedral Chapter wanting to present the future Bishop of the Diocese with a fait accompli on his appointment, and further expresses doubt as to whether such an ordination may be considered in concordance with the legislation concerning ordination in as much as a lifelong service in the Church or in education must undoubtedly be a presupposition for ordination.

Only Bishops Willing to Ordain Women in the Future?

In an interview in the religious paper "Dagen" in Bergen the Swedish Minister of Church Affairs Mr. Ragnar Edman, says that in the future only such bishops as are willing to ordain women should be considered.

When asked if he meant that a clergyman who is opposed to women pastors ought not to be appointed for any bishop's office, the Minister answered, "Yes, of course".

This answer has caused wide attention. Bishop Bo Giertz, Gothenburg, who, as mentioned above, is one of the leaders of the opposition to women pastors, says in the "Dagen":

"It must be in the interest of the Church always to have Bishops who will not ordain women because there will always be candidates who will find it difficult to let themselves be ordained by a Bishop who has previously offended against the Biblical and Apostolic Confession."

The Bishop also believes that it will be easier to maintain contact with certain other Churches as long as at least some of the Bishops refuse to ordain women, and he continues:

"There can be no objection to nominate as a candidate to a vacant see a man who is opposed to women pastors. I believe that it would be a most serious blow to the prestige of the Swedish Bishops' Conference if in future Bishops are not to be appointed according to their abilities and merits, but first and foremost according to their willingness to ordain women."

Meeting for Unity in the Church.

On April 20th a big meeting was held in the Sofia Church at Jönköping, Sweden, in order to strengthen the unity in the National Lutheran Church of Sweden, this unity having been threatened by the crisis which has arisen from the question of ordination of women. The Bishop of Skara Sven Danell, of Växjö Elis Malmström and of Linköping Ragnar Askmark addressed a very big congregation.

Bishop Danell said among others: "Serious sins of different kinds have been made in the last time and have caused much harm in our Church. Every group in the Church should confess their sins and do penance. If Jesus Christ had really been the living reality He must be some things during the last time had not happened."

Judiciary Board Turns Down Proposal for New Lay Service for Women.

The Swedish Crown Lands Judiciary Board has turned down a proposal by the Church Assembly in 1957 for the establishment of a new lay service within the Church especially intended for women. The Church Assembly of 1958 suggested that a sum of 100,000 Swedish crowns should be placed at the disposal from the Central Church Fund for the training of women for such service.

Discussion on Missionary Problems in South Africa.

Rev. Gunnar Helander, former Swedish missionary in South Africa, has started a heated discussion on the principles for Swedish foreign mission work, especially in South Africa, by publishing an article in the weekly paper "Svensk Kyrkotidning".

In this article Mr. Helander sharply criticizes the view that a "national Church", i.e. a Church limited to people of a certain group, is the best kind of Church, thereby adopting the policy of racial discrimination in the Church. He refers to the Roman-Catholics and the Anglicans who flatly refuse to recognize congregations confining their membership to one particular race. He further reproaches the mission for accepting as a matter of course that a Swedish missionary draws 4-5 times the salary of his African colleagues, occupies a better house, and keeps up quite another standard of living. Finally he regrets that

the Lutheran respect for authority has resulted in the Lutheran missionaries keeping conspicuously quiet while Methodists, Roman-Catholics, and especially Anglicans protest loudly against the unjust laws about racial discrimination.

Head of the Swedish Institute of Missionary Research at Uppsala, Professor Bengt Sundkler, has replied rather sharply and in detail to Mr. Helander's attack. Among other things, he emphasizes that in several countries in Africa Lutheran regional Churches, reaching across all racial divisions, are actually being planned for during these years, and that relations between the different races in, for instance, the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches are not nearly so perfect as may be supposed from appearances. As for the differences in salaries, the Professor would, personally, like the grants towards salaries for clergymen and evangelists in the Church to be increased, but this would, for one thing, involve very large sums if the principle of equal pay were to be introduced on all the mission fields and, for another, the Churches themselves particularly want to manage the matter of their own salaries.

A great number of contributions in the debate have come from various sides.

"Young People Go to Church".

"Young people go to church - a new and surprising fact:" Thus the Stockholm evening paper "Expressen" recently began a series of reports on the youth activities in suburban parishes. The paper mentioned the fact that not all young people have any deeper interest in religion, but fastened upon another fact that on Sundays young people filled pew upon pew in the newly erected suburban churches. One might even go so far as to speak of a young people's movement. Several leaders of Christian youth work have expressed their opinion on the reason for the movement. One of the young people themselves answers, "One becomes so restless by going to church."

900 Jehova's Witnesses in Gaol in the Course of 19 Years.

During the last 19 years 900 members of the group called Jehova's Witnesses have been sent to gaol in Sweden, according to the Stockholm evening paper "Expressen". They are young men who have refused to do not only military service but also civilian work offered in exchange. In this connection the Free Church Press bureau writes in a leader:

"One may feel that the Jehova's Witnesses adhere to an unhealthy and false doctrine, that their attitude is inconsistent, and - rightly - have pity on them for their aberration, but, nevertheless, one must object to the present practice. If the Constitution says that the King must not force anybody against his conscience, then this must also be true of the Jehova's Witnesses. By no means should we present them with a martyr's crown."

Proposal that the Church Itself Should Take the Initiative.

"Svensk Pastoraltidskrift", the organ of the "Kyrklig Samling" (Confessional Front) has suggested that the Church itself should take the matter in its own hands in case the new parish readjustment expected to be passed by Parliament within two years should prove unsatisfactory. Everything seems to indicate that in several dioceses the new organization will mean an appreciable reduction in both the number of parishes and clergymen out in the country while the number is expected to be raised in the ever growing towns. The "Svensk Pastoraltidskrift" now suggests that the Church itself should supplement the official Church organization with a voluntary one by, for instance, collecting one million Swedish

crowns annually to pay for 40-50 clergymen who might be put in where they are most needed. Or one might consider accommodating deacons in the empty vicarages where they might carry on the work of the Church in parishes no longer having a permanent minister. Or one might take the Anglican Church as pattern and employ highly qualified laymen in ecclesiastical part-time jobs.

At the moment the leaders of "Kyrklig Samling" are considering the problems mentioned in the article.

Archbishop Hultgren on South Africa.

On the matter of the tragic racial situation in South Africa, Archbishop Hultgren of the Swedish Lutheran National Church says in a statement:

"As Archbishop of the Church of Sweden I appeal to those in power in South Africa in time to enter upon the road leading to reconciliation and understanding between the races. Only when the love of Christ gains predominance in our hearts peace may be established. We who must follow these events from a distance are urged to bring the distress of South Africa before God in supplication so that He by His Spirit may awaken the dead hearts and create a completely new fellowship between all people in South Africa."

On April 10th, a prayer for South Africa was read in the Swedish churches.

New Bishop of Lund.

Dr. Martin Lindström has been appointed the Bishop of Lund. Bishop Lindström, who is 55 years old, was lecturer at the University of Lund from 1937-1941, and in the year 1938-1939 he was visiting professor at the Augustana Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Ill. Since 1942 he has been headmaster of the Lundsberg boarding-school. In his student days Bishop Lindström was very active in the Student Christian Movement. Mrs. Lindström was a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches from 1954-1958.

News in Brief:

- The Swedish Government has brought in a Bill that Free Church ministers be granted the same exemption from the duty of giving evidence before courts of justice as clergymen in the Lutheran National Church enjoy, i.e. with regard to anything confided to them in secret confession.

- The Evangelical National Missionary Society of Sweden plans to start sending evangelical programmes over the broadcasting station in Monte Carlo in co-operation with the Norwegian Norea Radio, run by the Norwegian Lutheran Mission.

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